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ABSTRACT

This journal contains the following articles pertaining to English instruction in rural schools: (1) "Different, To Be Sure" (Nathan James Weate) compares rural and urban students and finds rural students to have strong family cohesiveness, strong moral values, and diversified interests; (2) "An Elevating Experience" (Dorothy Trusock) describes a freshman writing experience which involves researching travel destinations and writing and telling about an imaginary journey; (3) "Outdoor World" (Craig Akey) details an elective English course, "Outdoor Literature" which uses various novels and writing assignments to discuss endangered species, sportsman's ethics, ecological relationships, and the question of hunting; (4) "Expanding Audiences in a Rural Classroom" (Richard Lessard) relates the experiences of a junior English class in reading and reacting to correspondence with a group of inner city fourth grade students; and (5) "Window: Teaching in Rural, Scenic, Tricultural Northern New Mexico" (Alfredo Lujan) uses the analogy of the computer "window" to bring glimpses of his Pojoaque, New Mexico environment through his eyes and the eyes of his middle school students. (KS)

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Journal of the Assembly of Rural Teachers of English (ARTE) 1992

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FOREWORD

On the following pages are five articles which point out the qualities and the strengths of rural schools.

The first story, which is the most general, presents Jim Weate's views of how rural school students are different.

Recognizing these differences, Dorothy Trussock describes how she opened new vistas for her students who had not ventured beyond the confines of their community. Dorothy's plan for her students was to take a "dream" vacation.

Craig Akey recognized the difficulty his students had of perceiving different views and of accepting the benefits of reading and writing. Craig resolved this dilemma through a unique set of reading and writing experiences based on the out-of-doors.

In yet another approach to an enlarging of vistas, Richard Lessard had his rural students correspond with inner-city youth. Richard found his students gained new understandings.

In the final article, Alfredo Lujan writes of the "windows" in his rural New Mexico teaching environment. He lifts us from the here and now real world of his students into the technologic world of the Twenty-first Century computer "window."

Thanks to the writers and thanks to the readers of this journal for their parts in this professional interchange of ideas.

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DIFFERENT, TO BE SURE

by Nathan James ("Jim") Weate
Lamoni Middle School
Lamoni, Iowa

Having taught in the big city, in fact, in the same building where *Teachers* (United Artists, 1985, starring Nick Nolte and Jobeth Williams) was filmed, I can attest to the fact that the rural students who are in my wife's and my classrooms are *different, to be sure* from urban students. Their differences, brought about largely by the rural environment, make a dramatic effect upon learning. Who are these students? How are they different? How does this affect learning?

Let me back up first to explain that I started teaching thirty-one years ago and taught for six years before leaving the profession before my wife Gwen and I ended up in rural America. I returned to teaching in Lamoni, Iowa, after a twenty-year absence. Five years before I reentered the schools, Gwen had begun teaching in Eagleville, Missouri, ten miles south of Lamoni. She had done her student teaching several years before in a city high school, so she had a teaching background similar to mine. She noticed a decided difference between urban and rural students. It was her satisfaction with teaching in the rural environment that helped persuade me to reenter the classroom. She observed for me that her rural students had entirely different perceptions of life than the urban students we had both previously encountered.

Just how different perceptions can be between students of the same age due to environmental factors was brought home to Gwen and me at Christmas time one year. We arrived in Columbus, Ohio, late in the evening, having traveled all day so our daughters could spend the holidays with their grandparents. Julie and Gail had slept all the way from Indianapolis, so Gwen and I decided to awaken them to see the downtown lights and have them fully awake by the time we arrived at the grandparents' house. The two girls peered out the car windows silently for some time before our younger daughter Gail drawled softly, "Boy, have they got big grain elevators." Silence prevailed for several moments before thirteen-year-old Julie seconded, "Yeh." Gwen and I never dreamed our daughters wouldn't recognize skyscrapers for what they were. The only kind of tall structures they saw regularly: grain elevators at the Farmers' Coop. These were always decorated at Christmas, also.

Yet the difference in perception of physical objects was not the most significant influence upon the educational outlook of the students. Gwen and I have identified the ones we consider most influential. Our selections fall into three clusters: peer relations, academic outlook, and community relations. We would

hasten to emphasize that our selections and our conclusions are based upon our observations and are not scientifically decided or supported.

Small enrollments in rural school districts result in each grade level having only a handful of students. Students nearly become family to each other by the time the senior year is reached, regardless of the differences between and among each other, differences which in the circumstances of a large city environment would almost completely divide students, differences of economics, academics, and lifestyle. In a small school, the son or daughter of the area's wealthiest citizen might date or be best friends with the area's poorest citizen; in a small school the school's best student might be the best friend of or date the school's lowest achieving student; and, the student who likes Chopin and Shakespeare but despises Madonna and the Mets might date or be best friends of the student who despises Chopin and Shakespeare but adores Madonna and the Mets. The question is not, "Could such crossing of economic, academic, or lifestyle lines happen at an urban high school?"; the question, rather, is, "Does crossing of economic, academic, or lifestyle lines occur significantly more often at rural high schools than at urban high schools?" Gwen and I have an emphatic answer: crossing of socioeconomic lines happens in urban high schools, but such happenings are not expected; crossing of socioeconomic lines not only happens in rural high schools, but is not considered unusual or even noticed.

Several considerations have to be made. First, are the extremes of economics to be found in rural high school districts like they are in urban high school districts? Gwen and I recognize that extremes of wealth are not found in rural areas. While there are extremely poor people in rural areas--Lamoni is located, according to 1986 U. S. Department of Labor statistics, in the country's third-lowest annual wage area, only the Missouri Bootheel and Abermarle, North Carolina, areas being lower--there is not an extreme of wealth. In fact, virtually no one would be found living in a rural area who is much beyond the midpoint of the middle class. Because of the tendency toward economic levelling in rural areas, meaning that the economic differences are less between the richest and poorest families in the school district, association is more likely between and among students.

While these students are quite accepting of each other, their acceptance is basically of that with which they are accustomed. The converse is also true: they are not highly accepting of that with which they are unaccustomed, taking a long time, frequently, to accommodate new students. The "bomb" of a girl and the "hunk" of a guy who moves in will attract much attention for a while but will soon find herself or himself being forgotten as the old social relationships come back into play. The students from most rural schools don't get to know people quickly because of their reservedness and basically slow-paced natures, choosing to retain their old relationships rather than reaching out for new and different connections.

There are some advantages to

this reserve and resistance to change. For one thing, rural school students and their families are more family oriented. Such orientation tends to be self-perpetuating. Thus, the students are shown much attention by their families who follow their involvement in school activities--academic, cultural, and athletic--and the students look to their families for support and approval. The family unit in rural America constitutes a potent force.

Because of such strong family cohesiveness, there is less likelihood of drug use, with the one exception of the socially-accepted use of alcohol. One reason is that the family keeps track of its members so closely that any change in a son or daughter's behavior would be immediately noticed. But, a second reason is that the students in rural schools are given such security within their families that there is less need to seek the false security of drug usage than urban students face. Both Gwen and I are concerned that with the disintegration of family farms coupled with a growing divorce rate in rural areas due to changing societal values that have reached rural America later and slower, such security will diminish. Third, any rural school student known to be slipping into drug usage will likely find his or her school friends forming a barrier to isolate him or her from what most would find undesirable, and a spontaneous support group would be formed to convince their fellow student that such activity is unnecessary. Once again, however, breakdown is occurring on this front, and hard drugs are beginning to find their way in.

The strong moral values of most rural students have helped keep them out of the pattern of robbery and prostitution for the procurement of money with which to purchase drugs. Thus, they have indulged in tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana up to this time rather than the more expensive and "harder" crack and cocaine. Traditional morals of all types may be about to break down, however, so how long hard drugs can be kept out of the rural area is an uncertain dimension. Perhaps the close relationships among and between students will prevail.

The smallness of most rural schools, which allows such close relationships to exist that it results in such support, also results in students being highly involved in all kinds of school activities; the halfback on the football team, the senior representative on the student council, the male lead in the senior class play, the point guard on the basketball team, the trombone player in the orchestra, and the salutatorian are all the same person; in an urban school, these would all be different people. Small rural schools create highly diversified students who are strong-willed, generally capable, and highly involved individuals, but these students do not achieve the degree of attainment in any field of endeavor that the highly specialized athlete, dramatist, or academic does in the large city school. The rural school student is more relaxed all the way through his or her school days because of the steadying influence that a familiar group in a familiar environment creates. This steadying influence creates in students the desire to know people in the community as persons in

contrast to urban school students who would frequently prefer being anonymous and would prefer people around them to remain anonymous.

But, our observations are not of significance by themselves; the significance lies in their effect upon the classroom, their pertinence to the learning situation, their impact upon what will achieve a higher degree of academic involvement and results among rural school students. In short, how do the characteristics of these students affect learning?

First of all, the teacher in a rural school must be willing to be in the community for several years, allowing the community and the students to assess and accept him or her. Moreover, the teacher must present a view of himself and herself to the community that is somewhat stimulating to the students but is not threatening to the community's values. Gwen and I are not saying that this is as it should be; we are saying that for teacher survival and the sake of the students, the teacher should consider what the conservative communities of rural America will tolerate.

What the community will tolerate is not the only consideration; what the students will tolerate regarding teacher demands and expectations is yet another consideration. Rural school students, being so involved in so many activities are resistant to any demand which they consider extraordinary. The usual daily assignment, done in a somewhat sloppy and hurried fashion, is accepted as a necessary evil, but an assignment for which research beyond looking in an encyclopedia and writing beyond a hurried single draft will bring moans and groans. If one teacher in the school is more demanding than the other teachers, a sit-down strike is likely to occur against the one teacher. For an upgrading of students efforts to occur, a unified approach by all of the teachers in a school or district is almost essential.

The type of teaching that students respond to is quite predictable: the use of materials that expand their perceptions and assignments that relate to the world the students know. The materials to which students have related best in both my wife's and my classes have been slides, booklets, stories, and objects which pertain to our lives and which we have brought back from our travels. If Gwen and I have been some place and have memorabilia from those places, or if we have made or done something that illustrates what the students are studying, they will pay more attention to our presentations and will participate more in a discussion than if what is used as an illustration is audiovisual material from commercial sources.

The assignments which Gwen and I have found are most widely accepted in her home economics and my language arts classes have been ones based upon our travels to England, Scotland, Wales, Australia, New Zealand, and forty-four of the United States. Gwen has presented foods, fashions, and family styles from the places we have visited, having students compare what we found with what they know about their own lives.

I find language development and the history of the English language takes on a new dimension because of

my visits to London, Windsor Castle, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Lichfield, Oxford, Sydney, Melbourne, Alice Springs, Auckland, Wellington, and Rotorua. And writing is more palatable when research is conducted on the telephone or in the front room of relatives, finding out about family history; when exploration of a career is undertaken through an interview of a local person as part of the exploring process; when construction of an historical period includes talking with someone at the local retirement center or nursing home and looking at dates on tombstones and cornerstones.

Over 70 percent of the people in the United States live within one hundred miles of the coast. That means the remaining 30 percent are scattered throughout the vast interior. Many of these people live on farms and in small towns. And, even along the coasts, many people live on the farms and in the forests of Maine, North Carolina, and Oregon, far enough from a big city to be truly rural in nature and outlook. The rural students from these areas are not as motivated, specialized, or sophisticated as their big city counterparts; most rural students are straight, serious-minded, stable, dedicated individuals.

We are aware that this essay represents our observations and interpretations and is not scientific in judgment; this is a position paper which will hopefully generate responses and reactions followed by scientific investigation. In the meantime, we will continue our work serving rural students in the best way we can, those rural students we find so fascinating, challenging, and different.

Different, to be sure, and the kind of students those of us who are sold on life in rural America truly love to have in our classes.

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AN ELEVATING EXPERIENCE

by Dorothy Trusock
Arkansas State University
State University, Arkansas

Several years ago, an elementary language arts teacher told me a charming story about teaching in rural schools. A story she was reading to her second grade students was about a small boy's first visit to New York City and his ride in an elevator to the top of the Empire State Building. As she looked up from her book, she saw a puzzled look on many of her students' faces. She didn't need to inquire about the source; she knew instinctively. These young people had no idea what kind of contraption an elevator was. She put the book aside and began constructing a make-believe elevator. The floor of this elevator was a chair, and one by one she put the children in the chair and raised it slowly to simulate an elevator. You see, these students in this remote, rural area had never been to the closest big city, a community about 35 miles away where the small, two-story hospital had an elevator.

As a high school English teacher in a rural school, I tried to give my students "elevating experiences" in many ways. One writing experience which my freshmen particularly enjoyed I called "Travels Abroad" (with apologies to Mark Twain). I got dozens of travel brochures from travel agencies in a nearby metropolitan area. I would line them up around the room on tables, chalk trays, and any available surface before the students entered the room. When class started, I would tell the students about someplace I visited. It didn't have to be exotic, romantic, or whimsical; anyplace more than 50 miles from the community would do. The experience could be about anything. They were just as fascinated by a story of a baby orangutan in the Cincinnati Zoo as they were by the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace. The next step was to pair the students for the writing assignment. I used a system similar to grouping students for a cooperative learning experience. The important thing was that I did the pairing so no one was left out; in the event I had an odd number, I would put three in a group. Now the students were ready to examine the brochures; they were free to wander the room, discussing the brochures and choosing one which particularly fascinated them.

With their brochures in hand, the students were then given the assignment. The first was a trip to the library where the students located their fantasy land on a map and read about the area to give them a sense of the people, the economy, government, culture, and major attractions. Students were also encouraged to talk to people who had been to their chosen area for additional information. Even students who would choose Boston, Seattle, or San Francisco would need to know something about the

city and state. The library work takes about two class periods.

When they knew something about where they were going, they began planning the trip. At this point, they had to decide what they wanted to do while there and how long they would stay. Financial considerations were important. How much could they afford to spend? The students set their own financial boundaries. Next, deciding how to travel, when to go, and where they would stay had to be considered. Planning what to take, depending on the length of stay and climatic conditions, would be an important item on their agenda. This was always great fun for the students! Some trips were very classy while others were more rustic, depending on how the participants wanted it.

Lastly, the students would take their "dream" vacation. Armed with their reading adventures, they were encouraged to be as creative as their imaginations would allow as they wrote about their travels which they explored through the eyes of the many writers they had read. The final phase of the assignment was to tell the class about their journey, using pictures found in books, magazines, or other sources if available.

My students found this an energizing and exciting assignment. It allowed them to learn about another region of this country or the world, and it tapped their creativity while challenging their oral and written communication skills. Most of all, I always hoped it would be a prelude of things to come for them, a real Bon Voyage.

OUTDOOR WORLD

by Craig Akey
Clintonville Senior High School
Clintonville, Wisconsin

Designing an elective course for high school juniors and seniors, particularly those who will terminate their education with their diploma, if they get that, can be a real challenge. The fact that these students have disliked English for ten or more years doesn't help the situation either. In our rural Waupaca County town, surrounded by the Wolf, Embarass, and Pigeon Rivers, trapping, fishing, year-around hunting, snowmobiling, and probably poaching are all activities that students actively pursue much more than reading or writing. A close look at these students' hobbies and interests, however, provided me with a semester course, Outdoor Literature, that motivates more reading and writing than I would expect from any class.

I taught this class as a semester credit for the first time in the fall of 1985. I believe it was a genuine success and would like to share some content ideas and writing ideas that I felt were especially successful. Though the reading and writing coincided, I will treat them separately.

Content was divided into four main thematic areas: Endangered Species, Sportsman's Ethics, Ecological Relationships, and The Question of Hunting. An excellent novel choice to complement a study of endangered species is *The Silent Sky* (Landfall Press, 1965) by Albert Eckert. Eckert tells his story through the third person description of a passenger pigeon which is born into a flock of millions and becomes the last of its species. Eckert emphasizes the effects of nature and the natural habits of the passenger pigeon itself as a cause of its extinction but also reminds us of man's greed and thoughtlessness as the species is decimated. The book is also of interest to students because the flock often migrated through Wisconsin, nesting west of Tomahawk. It is a motivating book with students being most interested in the assaults on the nesting grounds.

Another novel with a Wisconsin flavor is Mel Ellis' *Wild Goose, Brother Goose.* (Grosset and Dunlap, 1969) This is the well-known tale of Duke, a Canada Goose, and his migrating and survival through the Horicon Marsh in Central Wisconsin. It works well with a unit of sportsman's ethics because Ellis was fired from his position as *Field and Stream* associate editor for his portrayal of hunters in this novel. An interesting follow-up of Duke can be gained by reading the Ellis "Little Lakes" columns in *Wisconsin Sportsman.*

I turned to Eckert again for a novel emphasizing the relationship of each living thing to its environment. The book is *The Wild Season* (Landfall Press, 1981). It creatively traces a food chain, beginning with a large-mouth bass eating a frog and continues the chain, ending in a cyclic pattern

with another bass ready to devour another frog at the end. Man interferes at times, sometimes positively, sometimes negatively. Also making the book interesting to the students is the fact that each species that is part of the system at Eckert's mythical Oak Lake is common to our Wisconsin ecological system. Eckert combines a good blend of theme with factual information in presenting his appreciation of nature.

To supplement activities on the question of hunting, we read our most popular book, *Monarch of Deadman Bay* (Little Brown, 1969), by Roger Caras. Caras is an internationally known naturalist and has done environmental spots on ABC television. Monarch is a Kodiak bear on Kodiak Island and is pursued by a variety of trophy hunters, some more ethical than others. One is a violator, one a professional who only wants the trophy for prestige, another is a more common sort who saved his quarters for the trip of a lifetime, and one hunts with a camera. Each hunter provides interesting discussion and analysis by class members as the students support or object to Caras' presentation. Caras weaves many other themes through his book as well in helping the reader to understand, appreciate, and respect what nature has to offer us all.

There are as many outdoor poems, short stories, essays, news articles, and other writings as the instructor is willing to find. The two *Heartland* anthologies, edited by Lucien Stryk (Northern Illinois University Press, 1967 and 1975) provide many poems, including Dennis Schmitz's "The Wounded Doe" and Norbert Krapf's "Skinning a Rabbit", that provide experiences that are common to Central Wisconsin students. *Sounds and Silences* edited by Richard Peck (Dell, 1970) contains William Stafford's "Travelling Through the Dark" and Robinson Jeffers' "Hurt Hawks."

Many traditional authors provide good short story sources: Hemingway, Faulkner, London, and Bradbury to name a few. Stephen Crane's "Lynx Hunting" from *The Complete Short Stories and Sketches of Stephen Crane* (Doubleday, 1963) is a dandy story about a young boy's first hunt. The state outdoor magazines *Wisconsin Sportsman, Fins and Feather,* etc. also are good sources for reading material. There are often stories and articles about poachers, wardens, area history, as well as good fiction. One of the best appeared in *Fins and Feathers* (January, 1977) by Steve Grooms. It is titled "The Call of the Wild" and deals with a pheasant hunt in the year 2005. All of the four main course themes are touched upon in this speculative piece.

To supplement the reading we obtained an excellent sound filmstrip, "What They Say About Hunting" from the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agency, a five-part news sequence on poaching from WLUK-TV in Green Bay, interviewed a local game warden, and interviewed Roger Caras via a portable conference telephone. Again, projects are limitless.

These readings, viewings, discussions, and interviews provided the basis for many writing assignments. Previous to this class, many had never read an essay opposing hunting, so reaction by some was nearly vehement. It was no problem to have free writing activities when students were willing to express their point of view on issues of much concern to

them. For now, though, I would like to describe two writing assignments which met with great success.

First was the letter writing exercise. Many of these students had never written a letter, unless it had been part of a Warriner exercise. When we write them, we send them. First, we found lists of environmental organizations of state agencies. We discussed letter format and discussed what kind of information we would like to receive. This first letter writing activity was a three-day project. When final drafts were completed and the school-provided envelopes were addressed--we even practiced letter folding--the letters were mailed through the school mail (free to students). At first, I was afraid that this activity would be too juvenile for rough, tough junior and senior boys but it wasn't. Within a week I was constantly stopped in the hall with "Mr. Akey, my letter came. Shall I bring it to class?" Of course I wanted that because the material received provided good subject material for class reading and discussion.

Several weeks later, we wrote to hunting and fishing guides across the United States. Some even wrote for information about African safaris. We took the addresses from any advertised in the several outdoor magazines in our school library. This time the letter writing only took a class and a half as many students remembered the letter format. We discussed questions to ask in our letters, wrote, folded, sealed, and mailed. Again we got a good response of brochures and pamphlets.

We also got an idea for another letter. Many guide services sent reference lists. So, some weeks later, we wrote again. Each student had the name of a hunter who had gone to Montana, or Wyoming, or New Mexico and now tried to find if the hunter got his money's worth. Reference responses weren't as good but I did notice that the letter writing activity barely took 45 minutes for all to complete.

We wrote letters; there is no end to ideas here either. By giving the students a real audience, the experience was fun. And by spacing the assignments, the recall of format and process seemed to make an impression that maybe will be remembered better than if we had done one and then forgotten it.

Our other major writing effort involved a book of hunting stories, ala *Foxfire*. Each student interviewed a relative or friend or neighbor who had hunted in Waupaca County some years ago. We tried to isolate a specific experience: The Most Memorable Hunt, or the First Hunt, for example. We talked in class a great deal about questioning techniques: how to get specific, what kind of specifics are important, etc. The students had then three weeks to gather their information. We did this during deer season when the stories can be especially good. Then we wrote, and rewrote, and rewrote again. Knowing that the stories would be published helped alleviate the tedium of rewriting. Even when I read the early drafts, though I was impressed by both the stories and the writing. And, there were several surprised teachers in the school when it was seen what this class could do. We designed a cover and with help from the high school typing class and the printing class, a book of Waupaca County hunting stories was a reality.

Before I stop writing here, let me include a favorite poem, the author of which I don't recall:

FISHING TRIP

Joe digs a big Old Judge can
full of worms (with a few grubs),
your dad makes doughballs
out of ship-stuff and sorgum,
gets chicken guts from the butcher
free,
the three of you go out past
the White Bridge and seine
a thick bucket of minnows,
come back and load the car
with the gear: a .22, carbide
lamp, flashlight, couple of cots,
lines, hooks, leaders, sinkers,
corks, plugs, flies, reels,
trot lines, bacon, eggs, bread,
flour, corn meal, lard, salt,
pepper,
silverware, paper, plates, matches,
kerosene, and something you forget,
soda pop, a case of Falstaff, fifth
of Seagram's and drive on down
to Clearwater to set up camp, rent
a boat, scrounge a couple of extra
cans, set out the trotlines, piss
in the woods, and hope for good luck
these next two days on the river.

It sounds like a darn good trip to me. And that's what teaching the class was. In the words of one of my students as an evaluation at course's end, "I liked the class because we all got involved in the stuff. I ain't much for reading but them Books weren't half bad."

Supplemental Writing Assignments:

1. A "Bio" poem using an animal or person from any book we read (some became a part of our book.)
2. Any "form" poem in relation to a personal experience or to a situation in our readings.
3. Dialogue assignments--between Mel Ellis and his editor, for example.
4. Narratives:
   a. What I like about hunting besides the kill
   b. Getting ready for hunting
   c. First hunt
   d. Most memorable hunt
   e.
5. Comparisons:
   a. Bow hunting/Gun hunting
   b. Lead shot/Steel shot
   c. Ice fishing/Summer fishing
   d. Snowshoeing/Snowmobiling
   e. Downhill/Cross country skiing
   f.
6. Descriptions:
   a. a Tip-up
   b. a Trap
   c. a Spinning Reel
   d. a Snowshoe
   e. a Good Deer Blind
   f.
7. Position Paper (for or against)
   a. Trapping
   b. Fish Locators
   c. Changing Fishing or Hunting Seasons
   d. Indian spearing
   e.
8. Process
   a. Cleaning a gun
   b. Building a blind
   c. Maintaining a snowmobile
   d. Fly tying
   e. Skinning a rabbit
   f.

Other Favorite Books for Supplemental Reading:

Caras, Roger. *Panther.* University of Nebraska, 1992.

Caras, Roger. *Source of the Thunder.* University of Nebraska, 1992.

Durden, Ken. *Gifts of an Eagle.* Bantam, 1974.

Eckert, Allan W. *The Great Auk.* Little, 1963.

Eckert, Allan W. *Incident at Hawk's Hill.* Dell, 1971.

Ellis, Mel. *The Mysterious River.* Holt, 1972.

Herbert, Marie. *Winter of the White Seal.* Signet, 1983.

Laurence, R.D. *The North Runner.* Ballantine, 1979.

Mowat, Farley. *Never Cry Wolf.* Bantam, 1979.

Stoew, Leland. *Crusoe of Lonesome Lake.* Ballantine, 1957.

Stuart, Jesse. *Hie to the Hunters.* McGraw, 1950.

Weitz, Chauncey. *A Game Warden's Diary.* Willow Creek Press, 1983.

(The above article was originally published in *Wisconsin English Journal,* October, 1986, pages 6-9. Reprinted by permission. Craig Akey received runner-up award in the twelfth Lucille S. Pooley Teaching Award, sponsored by the Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English, for this article.)

EXPANDING AUDIENCES IN A RURAL CLASSROOM

by Richard Lessard
Alpena Community College
Alpena, Michigan

I never realized how lucky we are--never realized how good a place we have to live in. I really took for granted the peace we have here. How others may say the peace is "boring" but compared to the gangs and things of the big city, I appreciate it much more than I did. (Rae, age 16)

Rae is reflecting upon her experiences reading and reacting to the writings of a group of inner city fourth grade students in the spring of 1990. Through mail, both conventional and electronic, the younger writers shared their writing with my high school juniors and we shared our writing with them. This provided a promising forum for students to explore each others' language and worlds. Dan Madigan, a doctoral student at The University of Michigan, and I wanted to create an ongoing exchange with readers who did not share the same everyday events, students from different cultural, ethnic, and age backgrounds. Since the assumptions one makes about a setting determine the choice of actions and their operational composition (Wertsch, 1985, p. 212), we hoped they would see both themselves and the world in general more clearly by explaining some things in their respective environments to each other. We believed that human mental processes can only be understood by considering *how* and *where* they occur. Individuals are called upon to define and redefine themselves and their worlds as they explore the language needed in various contexts. Not only did we want to broaden their worlds by getting "real life" ideas about other environments, but we also wanted students to apply some of the things they knew about writing--and perhaps took for granted. Through this project, our students were challenged to reflect upon their own perceptions of the world and explain things in ways that are not necessary when they write for a teacher or for students with backgrounds similar to their own.

As a teacher in a small, rural northern Michigan high school for twenty-two years, I found that not only did I have to confront the traditional adolescent view that the world really began the day they were born, but my students frequently had the naive, ethnocentric notion that the world ended at the county line. I found most of my students tended to view the world through very myopic eyes, perceptions filtered by their very limited experiences and belief systems. These, in turn, were colored by the biased influences of their communities and families. Most of their parents grew up in our small town, as did their parents' parents, and so on. It was difficult for them to conceive that other people's lives and values may not coincide with theirs, or that individuals could

hold different perspectives without being "wrong." They usually had little concept of what those in the "outside world" encountered in the process of growing up, and they only sporadically reflected upon what had happened to them and/or what it meant.

I kind of took for granted the clean air and the way we can spend our leisure time any way we feel without fear of being attacked or something. (D.G., age 16)

As they approached graduation, many would say they wanted to leave the area, but they seldom knew what it was they wanted to leave, where they wanted to go, or what was waiting for them "out there."

In an effort to provide more natural, "real world" uses for what we were doing in class, I had converted my classroom to the writing/reading workshop format. It was modeled after the ones described in the works of Robinson (1990), Atwell (1987), Graves (1983), Elbow (1981) and others. I saw no reason to reinvent the wheel, although I found I had to customize it a great deal. But I identify with Giroux (1988) who suggests that students cannot operate in an atmosphere that glorifies the teacher as the expert, the sole dispenser of knowledge; they need to have an opportunity to learn from each other and on their own. "Education, if it is to prepare the young for life as lived, should also partake of the spirit of a forum, of negotiation, of the recreation of meaning" (Bruner, 1986, p. 123).

Since I was already working toward these pedagogical notions, students were accustomed to discussing and responding to the work of other students when we started our exchange; we just had to make the transition from talking about their own writing to talking about the writing of the younger students. Most of the discussions about what they were reading and writing took place in both large and small groups; I'd run copies of students' work, and groups would give reactions to it, as readers who were also writers. I found that in the small groups, students had a much better opportunity to become active participants. In addition, I soon learned that I could not go into the workshop sessions with a planned, hidden agenda. I couldn't begin with the idea that the students were to see and discuss the things I wanted them to discuss. They had to be allowed their own voices in what was addressed and where it went. If not, they would soon see through me, realizing that I was merely manipulating them for my own goals rather than letting them participate in a genuine conversation--a legitimate collaborative situation.

Many of the sessions were chaired by students while I was working with another group. I often taped these sessions (perhaps to convince them and myself that they could learn without me) and I found them to be very productive. I felt I had to give them the opportunity to think and learn in the classroom without me directing everything they did. It is impossible for students to develop autonomy and a sense of responsibility if they are always told what to do and how and when to do it (Stipek, 1988, p. 73). Higher level thinking skills begin with the freedom of expression and the use of the students' own voices in discussing those issues in a piece of writing which most concern *them*.

The older students were easily able to see the roots of common

communication problems that plague younger and basic writers [see below]. The eleventh graders were also much more confident that they could help the younger children with their writing as well. Although these objectives could have been met had we adopted a more local group, we had the double goals of broadening their social as well as their academic horizons.

When workshopping the younger authors' papers, the discussions typically centered on topics, details, and meaning rather than on grammar or construction. Although our juniors frequently noted grammatical problems, it was usually a casual reference added at the end of the session, when editing *should* be of concern. It was not something that overshadowed the real purpose of writing--the desire to communicate. "He's only a fourth grader," they would often remind each other. Form has so often taken precedence over content in schools that students frequently fail to think seriously about context (Robinson, 1990). Too much emphasis on grammar, construction, and "correctness" only serves to reduce writing to its lowest denominators (Heath, 1983), and, thankfully, our students got past that type of thinking about the children's writing.

Conformity to stereotyped styles . . . tends to conceal a sense of commitment to what is being said. The effect is both to alienate the individual from the practice of writing, and to encourage a kind of obscurantism which may be inimical to clear thinking. (Wason, 1984, p. 125)

What actually took place in the discussions of these writings could best be related by the students themselves. I have transcribed portions of two of the workshop sessions and they indicate the kinds of things which took place in them. The first is a discussion of what a fourth grader intended to be a piece about his family. In it he described those closest to him and how he felt about them. The students discussed this one without me.

DG: I can see what he means by being smushed in a bed with five kids in the same bed.

HS: Yea, and then he says a lot about his grandmother and grandfather.

MB: It's hard for me to keep track of these people. Like the uncle who was in jail now but lives with his family--when? whose family?

JP: He doesn't mention his father at all.

BL: This uncle doing crack and stealing has this fancy car; does he live there too? If he does, why doesn't he help out?

MB: Yea, he [the author] likes this guy because he gives him lots of things. I wonder what he's giving this kid?

DG: This kid is exposed, man! He sees some pretty rough things.

VC: He talks a lot about fighting.

HS: His mother doesn't like fighting and neither does his grandmother. Meanwhile this uncle is teaching him how to fight and be tough. I wonder which one's helping him the most.

JK: Yea, how does the grandfather feel about all this?

JP: What about him [the author]? How does he feel about fighting?

BJ: Yea, then he just sort of

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stops.

MW: I see what he is trying to do with the ending, though. He is trying to end it on a positive note: "I like my mother best."

The group went on to talk about detail, focus, and transition. They had many questions to send to the young writer about the gaps between what he was meaning and what he was actually saying. I particularly noticed "BL's" comment about the uncle. There was little value judgment placed upon where the uncle got his money, only concern for the family, their unmet needs, and how this man could help them. There was clearly a great deal of interest in the welfare of the author and his family, the hardships they faced. They were responding to the text with genuine feelings for the author and his message.

Later we discussed a story written by a young girl regarding some difficult times her family faced when her mother was in a car crash. I participated in this workshop.

JL: I didn't really know where I was here.

PL: Yea, things were going too fast.

Me: Are you saying it needs focus?

CI: Right. We have almost three stories in one.

RM: And we don't know much about any of them.

(Several agree)

CI: We need to know more about each one of them.

MN: She says, "My big sister used to take care of me while my mom was at work." I'd like to know how old this sister is.

JH: She was afraid most of the time her mother wasn't there. What was she afraid of? I mean, we can guess, but I'd like to know for sure.

JF: What about the story of the mother's accident that she [the author] dreamed about? Wouldn't you like to see that expanded?

PL: Yea, that's an interesting story there.

KS: Not really.

Me: No?

KS: Nah. She needs to say more about Pork Chop John, living in the alley.

Me: That would be the third story you talked about?

MW: She says she was scared of him.

KS: Right. Why was that?

PL: Because of his "pop tops"?

KS: Or was it because he was really big and lived in the alley?

JL: Yea. What are "pop tops" anyway?

(All laugh)

MN: Got me.

Me: That's a good question. These are all good questions. We'll ask them today when we message S... on electronic mail.

Here, the group began to respond to the writing as writers themselves. They saw the need to "complete the story" for the reader. They were growing as readers and critics, but they also enlarged their views about the world. JL got on the electronic

message system and sent out our questions. We learned that Pork Chop John got his sobriquet because he was indeed a very large and heavy man, and he often ate in the alley. We learned that "pop tops" were bottle caps and Pork Chop John decorated his jacket with them, and that he wasn't really homeless but lived across the alley with relatives. He spent a great deal of time in the alley watching the children play--for reasons only he could explain. Once the children got to know him he wasn't quite so frightening, but his size was still overwhelming. About the other issues, S... was less open. Maybe it was because she was intent on telling us about John and overlooked the other questions; or perhaps she didn't want to expand upon the other stories for any of a number of reasons.

The project gave the students a reason to write; they responded to the children's writing because they saw meaning for undertaking a particular text; they saw it as a legitimate writing activity, not an assignment. Few writers will be motivated to begin a draft until they convince themselves, one way or another, that the draft is needed (Murray, 1984). My students asked genuine questions about things they really wanted to know, and they offered what they knew. They wrote about the only stop light in the entire county; they told about the beach, "spirit week," hunting, and milking cows in the morning before school. They told of a number of things in their lives that they had seldom reflected upon before.

It was fun telling about what was going on around school and the town. But I was surprised by the different things they do after school and the view they have of us.

My life on the farm has helped me to better understand how the people in the city might feel crowded. I guess I also expected that the kids wouldn't be all that smart but they were really smart.

I found out that all big cities are different because I've been to other cities and none are really the same. They thought the same as us, really, and their speech and writing seemed the same.

My older students found that when they wrote and commented on the fourth graders' writing, they had to adjust their topics, their language, and their purpose to the anticipated audience. They had to think carefully about the subjects they chose to write about, what they felt these young urban students would know or want to hear, what would need to be explained as well as what language should be used to explain it. In short, our students had to do what "real writers" have to do when composing a draft--consider audience. I asked the students to comment on what they thought about the experience:

You have to describe everything about yourself. I felt I had to explain everything because they were culturally different, but all in all, they weren't all that different.

Writing to these kids allowed you to pick any topic you desired and just spill your guts. I liked that. Although sometimes I wrote tentative because I wasn't sure they wouldn't take something the wrong way.

You really had to explain yourself better than you would with a teacher or your own classmates. I think everyone should write to different kinds of people because then they can understand each other better and know truly what they're like instead of stereotyping without really

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knowing.

Clearly the project forced our students to analyze some things in their own lives and communities. A few stereotypes were confirmed, but most were broken down; our students' images of children growing up in urban areas changed as they read the stories these young people had created. They learned about real fears and problems--not about the failure to have a date for the next dance, but genuine concern for safety. They learned about extended families, loyalty, and gratitude to those who were doing the best they could in difficult situations. They saw how many of the younger children were victimized by their environments--how frightened they were and how they felt so little control over what was happening around them. Yet there was an air of optimism expressed in the writings of these young children, often in the face of things which could have incapacitated some of the older students. "If we could just clean up their neighborhoods, these would be great kids, wouldn't they?" Mary said one day. "It scares me to think about what I'd be like if I had to live the way some of these kids do."

We created some emotional bonds as well. The older students began offering some big brotherly/big sisterly advice and encouragement. In the process, our students did some reflecting upon their own experiences with tough decisions they had to make:

I hope you aren't hanging around with those kids who are messing with drugs and stuff. You don't have to do that. We have drugs here too but I don't like them and don't hang around with people who do them; most of us don't. You could help your mother with things after school instead. It sounds like she needs your help.

[After a young boy expressed his interest in basketball, one of our boys wrote back] I like to play basketball too. It keeps me busy and then I don't get into so much trouble. I have to study so I can still play. You don't get into any trouble, do you?

I have a lot of homework to do too. It is really important to keep up your grades because school will help you in a lot of ways. I like math and writing the best. You are a good writer and I like the things you have sent us. Keep up the good work.

Later, as I replayed the tapes of the workshop sessions for this article, I noticed the sheer volume of interaction and conversation that was going on in them. They were enjoying the discussions on the writing and the issues brought up in them. Students were talking as much *in* the classes as they did *between* them, and that is almost a rarity in English classes. Discussions were very animated and open. Together the students accomplished much more than any of them could have accomplished alone.

It must be confessed that we weren't real sure what would come of this project when we started it. We tried to keep things focused and directed toward meaningful interaction, but we also had to allow for the spontaneous enthusiasm and interests of the students. The fourth graders sent us the pieces they chose to send us, and we sent back the honest responses of our students. The greatest difficulties we encountered were organizational. Timing was very important; responses had to be prompt and sure. Students were most enthusiastic about responding to writing when it first

arrived, and, once they sent something to the other school, they asked (daily) about the reply. Students at both ends were very anxious to see what others said about the things they had written.

It didn't take much in the way of money or facilities to do what we did. Goodness knows it never would have been possible if it had, given the usual tight budgets of rural school districts. The project could just as easily have been carried out through the standard postal services, although turn-around time would have slowed things down considerably. But through this exchange, I honestly believe that this project gave our students an invitation to enlarge their views about communities, themselves, and the purposes of writing. Actually, I'm pleased to think about how much my students were able to learn "without me."

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WINDOW:
TEACHING IN RURAL, SCENIC, TRICULTURAL NORTHERN NEW MEXICO

by Alfredo Lujan
Pojoaque Middle School
Santa Fe, New Mexico

I know what is a window: *Ventana:* Window. Of course I know what a window is. After all, I was raised in this half of the 20th century. As a child I'd stare out the kitchen window at day break when all was quiet and everyone was asleep. In front of me ascended the *Sangre de Cristos,* those majestic purple mountains on the eastern horizon. In my adolescence were many other windows--picture windows, those out of which I gazed while I was in school, studying the beauty of nature: the trees, the skies, the girls . . . and the girls outside my classroom . . . oblivious to what the teachers were saying. There were also windows on basketball backboards which I kissed with a glass shot from the wing. And there were those infamous broken windows which I shattered with hard balls, rocks, stick rifles, and *adobe*[1] hand grenades. Windows were windows. It was a simple word then. It was a simple world then.

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1 Earthen.

"Window" has a broader definition in the 1990's, this transitional decade that will link us to 21st century. I'm talking computer windows. You know, those technological wonders that are inside our monitors, those *ventanitas* which imitate the windows in our minds. I move my cursor to an icon, double click my mouse, and *whoosh* -- I get a window to peer into. I would like to imitate the Macintosh that imitates me by opening a rural[2] window for you.

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2 Uncomplicated, (". . . poetry is very, very rural . . ." -- Robert Frost), *Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged,* 1981.

Click, click.

I drive along the Rio Grande towards Taos and the snow-covered Truchas Peaks; *¡que vistas! Sa?wodi.*[3] Northern New Mexico is vibrant with color and transformation during the fall season. Come to think of it, northern New Mexico is always vibrant with change. *Click, click.*

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3 "Beautiful" -- Tewa Indian interpreted by Vickey Downey, Tesuque Pueblo.

Deeanza Ruybal, one of my 8th graders at Pojoaque, writes:

"The leaves are crisp and fragile. Reds, yellows, and oranges put on a show for us, just before the maples and cottonwoods die for the winter. The leaves are oval, have jagged edges, and brown veins. They cover mother earth. They make a noisy but soothing

sound when the wind is blowing them throughout. The warm but cool breeze of October leaves a smell like leather."

Click, click.

I stop for lunch at the Embudo[4] Station Restaurant on the western bank of the Big River. The red, yellow, and orange leaves rustle to the natural music they create. Some float into the water and are carried south to wither away and to fertilize the soil somewhere downstream in *Española, San Ildefonso Pueblo,* Texas, or the Gulf of Mexico. I push my barbecue sandwich aside and walk up to the river. I pick up a handful of water and splash it on my head, a self-baptism that my grandma Nestora taught me about . . . *mojando me la mollera.* I can't help but reflect on the afterlife: there is something glorious about maturation--the completion of the cycle . . . death . . . the harvest season. Oh, wow . . . I'm getting downright metaphorical, philosophical, or somethingawfical. I didn't mean to open *that* window.

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[4] Funnel. (*Velasquez Spanish and English Dictionary.*)

Click, click.

Pojoaque is the hub of no metropolis. It is, however, the central town in a rural community surrounded by other villages and pueblos. Students come to Pojoaque Middle School from four Native American Indian pueblos, six Spanish/Mexican/Hispanic/Chicano communities, and many Anglo families who have migrated to the area. To the east and northeast are *Pojoaque Pueblo, Nambe, Nambe Pueblo, Cundiyo,* and *Chimayo;* to the west are *Jacona, Jaconita, El Rancho,* and *San Ildefonso Pueblo;* to the north is *Arroyo Seco;* to the south are *Cuyamungue, Tesuque,* and *Tesuque Pueblo.*

The school is the physical and sociological core of the community (This is characteristic of any rural community, I think). School functions like open houses and basketball games are huge draws. The student population reflects the community population in Pojoaque. In fancy shmancy terms, our population is a *"sociocultural assimilation" . . . a "racial amalgamation."* Simply put--Pojoaque is a tricultural hangout; as such it is also a trilingual community. The three cultures co-exist peacefully for the most part; they are confluent yet contiguous to each other. The languages and cultures meet, but there are distinct traditions and rituals which are practiced by each culture separately. Each culture maintains its identity but is also influenced by the others. This is a unique society in a stunning rural setting.

I have my bias: northern New Mexico is in a beautiful state. Our local geography acts as a metaphor for the *confluencia* of cultures in our school community. John Elder, on-site director at the Bread Loaf School of English/Santa Fe, introduced us to the term "ecotone" in his New Mexico Literature class this summer. An ecotone is where two environments meet: "a transition area between two adjacent ecological communities (as forest and grassland) usually exhibiting competition between organisms common to both"[5] Like the

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[5] *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary.*

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social community, the diverse terrain amalgamates here, becoming a panoramic Land of Enchantment. The land acts like the people; the people imitate the land. All things become one.

I know this is true of every place and every thing and every one. This is as true of America as it is of Europe, as true *Santa Fe* as it is of Seattle. This is true of the Pojoaque Valley Schools and of the Spectrum Community School just across Puget Sound in Bremerton. It's as true of Chicago as it is of New York City or Los Angeles. And it's true of the cosmos.

Click, click:

Walt Whitman am I, a Kosmos of mighty Manhattan the son,
Turbulent, fleshy and sensual, eating, drinking and breeding;
No sentimentalist--no stander above men and women, or apart from them;
No more modest than immodest . . .[6]

The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem . . . Here at last is something in the doings of man that corresponds with the broad cast of the day and night.[7]

I celebrate myself, and sing myself
And what I assume you shall assume . . .[8]

I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise,
One of the Nation of many nations, the smallest the same and the largest the same,
A Southerner soon as a Northerner, a planter nonchalant and hospitable down by the Oconee I live,
A Yankee bound my own way ready for trade, my joints the limberest joints on earth and the sternest joints on earth . . .
. . .At home on Kanadian Snow-shoes or up in the bush, or with fishermen off Newfoundland,
At home in the fleet of ice-boats, sailing with the rest and tacking,
At home on the hills of Vermont or in the woods of Maine, or the Texan ranch.[9]

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[6] *Leaves of Grass. Song of Myself, 24.*

[7] Preface to first edition of *Leaves of Grass.*

[8] *Leaves of Grass. Song of Myself, 1.*

[9] *Leaves of Grass. Song of Myself, 16.*

Click, click.

I realize that I can't really talk about the "Kosmos" or all those other places in great depth; Carl Sagan or Walt Whitman I am not, but I am: *"Yo soy . . ."*[10] At home *en mi tierra* in northern New Mexico. *Un Norteño:* At home picking *piñon* or roasting *chile.* At home with my feet in the mud, *haciendo adobes.* At home while the Indians celebrate Independence Day with the Buffalo Dance. At home eating *tortilla* and *carnita* sandwiches. I can talk about the rich diversity of the rural people and landscapes of Pojoaque . . . where two rivers[11] meet.

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[10] Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, *I Am Joaquin/Yo Soy Joaquin;* New York, 1967.

[11] A river in New Mexico is the size of a stream, creek, or book in states that have a lot of water.

The geography of northern New Mexico includes the fertility of its ecotone and also the richness of the characters who inhabit it. In the high desert of northern New Mexico, the sand dunes rise and become brown and red foothills. The foothills, "not much larger than haycocks, and very much the shape of haycocks,"[12] are the infants of the *Sangre de Cristo* and *Jemez* Mountains, and the mountains touch the sky . . . at times with a gentle, powder blue caress . . . and other times with the vermilion fury of a storm. In northern New Mexico -- Spaniards, Indians, Mexicans, and Anglos also meet on the horizon.

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12 Willa Cather, *Death Comes for the Archbishop;* New York, 1990, p. 17.

Click, click.

Johnna Schweier, an Anglo student who moved to Pojoaque from Michigan, writes:

Watch out! That one almost got you. You've got to have eyes everywhere here at Pojoaque. You know how those Conquistadors and Indians are: knives, bullets, and arrows everywhere . . .

Psych!

It's pretty interesting coming to New Mexico after living in Michigan. When I first moved here, I was three and lived in Los Alamos, but it was an urban area that isn't much different than Michigan. After living in Los Alamos for eleven years, we moved down to the Pojoaque-El Rancho area where I went to school.

That was a big culture *shock*. I learned how there are many different ways of living and the different cultures. For instance, I had never heard of posole, green/red chile, or enchiladas before. The hot taste of all the *chiles* makes me want to dunk my head in a horse trough.

Click, click.

Piñon picking is a ritual in northern New Mexico. It may be a ritual other places too, but I can only speak of our own system of picking nuts. Every seventh year or so there is a bumper crop of *Piñon* nuts in our part of the country. The *piñon* trees grow their nuts in pine cones which open in the fall. The seeds drop to the ground and are planted by the early snow and rain of winter. There is an abundance of the seeds this year. Just after the seeds drop and before the inclement weather, we set out on our picnic picking treks. We pack a lunch and some coffee cans and a tarp, and we spend the day on our knees gathering seeds. Tourists and passers-by gawk at us from the highways, thinking, I think, that we must be awfully religious natives.

Click, click.

Angelina Garcia, another eighth grader writes:

Piñon

When we were younger my Dad would go pick *piñon* in Cundiyo. He would bring it home and wash it in a big strainer. He would then pour salt on it and roast it on a cookie sheet. It usually was in the winter during basketball season. My Dad and the whole family would sit in a corner of the gym and eat

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piñon. When we would get sick of *piñon,* we would venture our separate ways to cheer for the Elks with our friends.

And now we just go our separate ways with our friends. No more sitting in the corner with the family eating *piñon.*

Click, click.

The air is pure as nature in a rural community. In Pojoaque it is filled with the bouquets of juniper and *piñon; Chimaja* and sage brush; roasted *chile* and morning dew. *Uno y una* don't awaken to Exxon or blaring horns. We might hear the rooster crow and catch the scent of a skunk . . . these risks we take daily. But we don't mind:

Click, click.

Nadine Romero, 8th grader, writes:

The moisture of the air runs through the kitchen and fills it with comfort. The neighbor's horses make their cry of selfish hunger. I look out the secluded window to find peacefulness and the breeze brushing the sunflowers from side to side. The community of Cuyamungue seems quiet and dark like if I am the only person awake and getting ready for school. I am very hungry and anxious about those camping potatoes mixed with eggs and everybody's favorite: bacon.

Click, click.

Uno might get a tragic call in the middle of a dark, silent rural night; by *Adan Cordova,* 8th grade:

Asesino

Last night I lost *Asesino,* a very good and reliable friend. He used to take me anywhere I wanted to go. He would take me elk hunting, deer hunting, fishing, to look for the cows, and for walks down in the river beds. Even last Sunday I went to look for the cows with *Asesino.* He was a good pal until last night.

When they called us I thought it was all a bad dream. Some jack-ass came and hit him and broke his leg. It was a hit and run. So we went to the side of the road where he was, and my uncle shot him in the head because a horse won't recover from a broken leg.

Laura Jagles from Tesuque Pueblo was senior class president at Pojoaque High School last year. She is now attending Allegheny College in Pennsylvania. In a recent letter she enclosed the following response to *Silent Spring,* a novel she was reading:

Wednesday, September 25, 1991

This chapter, after many chapters like it, makes me mad! This book just makes me realize how much we are destroying my "brothers" and "sisters" on the rest of the earth. Being a Native American Indian, I consider myself a part of the earth, not living on her.

We, the Native American people, were here first. We never changed *mother earth,* and what she did for us. We used only the necessities we had.

I have nothing against the "white man," but they were the ones who came and tried to make changes. These changes are now destroying my world as well as the worlds of the birds, insects, and other animals. Especially the eagle.

Many or almost all of the Native Americans think of the eagle as

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high and mighty, for he soars higher than anyone or anything. The "white man" wanted to fly higher than him, so he built the airplane. Now, he wants to live better than him, so he produces chemicals.

I can't explain what I am feeling inside my heart at this time, but I don't think anyone else would understand unless they too consider themselves a part of the earth, a human being, and not a god on earth that controls everything.

We need to do something now before it is too late!

May the great spirit and mother earth help us all . . . may God take me naturally before the poisons and chemicals do.

Click, click.

Michelle Gonzales, a seventh grader, writes:

Chile Roasting

My family and my grandparents went out into their field and picked most of the *chile*. It had rained the night before we went picking, so it smelled fresh and crisp. We could see raindrops on the green *chile* leaves.

We picked practically the whole crop. We put the *chile* in sacks. The sacks smelled like old *chile* because we had roasted *chile* in them, and there were old *chile* seeds from last year. We got the sacks and took them home.

On the way, our van smelled like fresh picked *chile*. It smelled *so* good. When we got home, we left the gunny sacks in the van. The next afternoon my mom and I took them to a roasting place. Along the way we could smell the *chile* because there was a breeze that brought it in.

When we got there, the smell was so strong that it made me sneeze. My mom gave the *chile* to the man, and he opened it and put it in this big round roaster. It looked like a cage with a handle. He opened it and put the *chile* in. Then he turned it on. It sounded like a hot air balloon. Then I saw this hot sky blue light, then he started turning the cage. After a while the *chile* started to pop and crackle. Then one of the *chiles* started on fire. You could really smell the hot fresh *chile* roasting. It seemed like you could eat the air.

Click, click.

I'll close with that window. I can't say it any better. Our tricultural/trilingual rural community, Pojoaque, is a simple world: *". . . you could eat the air."*

Click, click.

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